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Understanding the Importance of Friendship in Young
Adulthood - *a Biographical Framework of Understanding the
Self*

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Abstract

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Problem/Background: Lack of sociological approach to the importance of friendship in young adulthood in the 21st century.

Purpose: Understanding Friendship

Abstract

This study attempts to highlight the importance of friendship in young adulthood, motivated by a curiosity of a lack of sociological attention. This is done by exploring concepts of modernity including individualism and the formation of identity. **Objective:** The research attempts to answer the questions: 1) how can the importance of friendship in young adulthood be understood, 2) how is the emotional support system experienced, and, 3) how identity is sustained or understood in the formation of friendship. **Method:** This has been achieved through narrative interviews with four participants from Copenhagen. **Results:** All the participants narrated high emotional dependence on their friendship in an emotional support system that established their identity.

Keywords: Intimacy, modernity, identity, generational sociology, friendship, social relations

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Introduction

My main motivation for writing this thesis was my curiosity about the prospect of friendship. When discussing indispensable emotions such as true and deep intimate love it is very often associated with the notion of family or lovers, such as the love between a parent and a child, or the intimacy between two lovers. But not very often is the deep love experienced between friends scrutinized – the profound love experienced outside the realm or scope of the traditional heteronormative family or romantic relationship. It has previously been suggested by Roseneil and Budgeon (2004), that sociologists should decenter the concept of ‘family’ and the heterosexual romantic relation from our intellectual imaginary, and instead focus on the relationship and intimacy between people in general. This is further prompted by Nordqvist (2013), who questions the very foundation of kinship and instead offers the concept of ‘kinning’ as a practice of actively creating a family (this is elaborated later). This suggests a new conscious constructivist approach to kinship, and thus offer new tools of interpretation to the family of choice debate. Other research on friendship has focused on the micro-structure of friendship such as the Interpersonal Process of Intimacy (Reis and Shaver, 1988), which highlights the interaction and exchange of emotional ties. Supplementary studies on friendship includes Argyle and Henderson’s “The Rules of Friendship”, a study that focuses on social behavior and social skills (Argyle and Henderson, 1984), Murray’s research on regulating the risk of Closeness also deals with micro-sociology of interaction (Murray, 2005). The common denominator for much previous research on friendship has been an emphasis on structure, combinations, gender aspect, components of friendship, or a specific segment in the population (*see* Argyle et al.: 1984; Reis et al., 1988; Fehr, 2004; Murray, 2005; Adams and Blieszner, 1995). This study wishes to understand the importance of friendship on an everyday basis of people in young adulthood. This study thus attempts to enlighten the research question: “How can the importance of friendship in young adulthood be understood?” The scope of this investigation focuses on friendship in young adulthood (age 19-29). The paper also seeks to address the questions: “How is the emotional support system experienced?” and finally, “how identity is sustained or understood in the formation of friendship”. Thus, I will attempt to illuminate the deep love experienced between friends, and give an account on the existential importance of the formation of friendship.

Amid much literature regarding friendship there is a heavy emphasis on the interactionist approach to the structure of friendship. This, however, is not the dimension of friendship this study attempts to illuminate. Nor does this paper question notions of the family, nevertheless, it shall draw parallels to the debate regarding family, as the literature offer a discussion concerned with the critique of a

heteronormative family structure and moreover proposes alternative methods of interpreting the emotional support system – intimacy and care - amongst people. This consequently gives a foundation upon which to understand the importance of friendship in everyday practices, and ultimately in the understanding of the self.

The research questions will be explored in two sections consisting of theory and analysis. The first section will address previous studies on friendship and family with an emphasis on the critique of a traditional heteronormative approach, and a discussion on alternative frameworks of understanding intimacy and care. This section also discusses theories on contemporary tendencies of modernity including the formation of identity, risk society and discourse analysis. Finally, the section deliberates generational sociology. The second part of this paper will address and analyze empirical data in the form of narrative interviews with four young adults, and how they relate to friendship, their lives, and themselves.

Methodology

My motivation for formulating the research question has been partly driven by my own subjective pre-understanding of the field in combination with a more general view upon sociology, seeing as I am a direct product of my time (contemporality), and the scope of the research, I have attempted to be as self-reflective concerning my biased predisposition that may have influenced how I interpret and view things as possible (Bryman, 2012: 39). In the following section I will attempt to give an account of the methodological approach taken in this paper.

Research Question

My motivation for formulating the research question “how can the importance of friendship in young adults be understood?” was fueled by a curiosity of a lack of attention in the area and an alleged change in society. This change consists of a generation of late bloomers in terms of initiating project family, and how this prolonged youth may or may not influence to formation of friendship and how this can be understood. Other research questions include ‘*how is the emotional support system experienced*’, and ‘*how identity is sustained or understood in the formation of friendship*’. Seeing as the nature of my research questions are indeed broad and unspecific elements from grounded theory approach has been utilized. These include the coding of components in interview transcriptions.

Research Design

The sampling of the participants has been geographically located in Copenhagen. The area in Copenhagen is called Nørrebro (Noerrebro) and is known for being a multiethnic, inner-city area characterized by high density of young adults of mixed gender and living in either collectives (groups of usually younger people sharing a flat), and often in a non-couple situation (Økonomiforvaltningen Center for Byudvikling, 2006). This area is also known for representing a specific segment of young people, associated with being politically liberal and left-wing orientated (dr.dk, 19-06-2015). This study focuses on ways of understanding friendship, and it must thus be noted that the empirical data is not representative of the rest of the population, or even the mentioned area in Copenhagen. All participants had varying backgrounds, but equal for them all were socio-economic class they identified with: middle class defined by both *taste*, education, and future income (Bourdieu in Crompton 2008: 102). They were all Caucasian students of higher education, and thus also belonging to a low-income group at the time of the interview. Their economic future is not in question. Four interviews have been conducted interviewing one male (Anders, 27) and three female subjects (Katrine, 24, Clara, 23, and Mette, 24). All fulfilling the requirements of young adults (age 19-29) (Levinson 1986: 5; Erikson, 1950), and all belonging to a generation where it is expected that they launch project family in later stages in life (around 30+) (Erikson, 1950). The sample has been chosen based on an assumption that they all represent the 'millennium' generation (this will be discussed later). All interviews have had the duration of one to one and half hour in order to gain ground for a narrative analysis. The interviews have been conducted openly allowing the participants to freely create their own stories and to emphasize what they thought was important in their lives. The gatekeepers has mainly been friends, henceforth the participants have been acquaintances, and we have been introduced prior to the interviews. One of the participants, Katrine, was an old friend. During the interviews, there has been attempts to avoid the interviewer effect, but this had proved difficult, and might lead to sources of unreliability. In addition to the interviews the study includes triangulation with demographical graphs depicting social and cultural development from Statistics Denmark.

It should be mentioned that the standpoint for the four participants differ significantly according the gender and sexual preference, that might prove a source of slanted results, or a strength in terms of varying perspectives on the research question. The number of participants has also been very limited giving rise the question of reliability of the outcome, however, seeing as the research question attempts to enlighten different experiences of friendship from a narrative perspective, the number of interviews may still be of relevance.

Coding

The research method approached in this study is mainly qualitative methods with emphasis on narrative interview approach where data has been collected using life story method (Denzin 2009: 237). To explore patterns of the interviews coding has been used as a tool to discover potential theoretical significance (Bryman, 2012: 568). The interpretation of the interviews has been further broken into component parts, groundwork for the further analysis in order to investigate the concepts of how friendship in young adults can be understood (ibid.: 569). The interpretation of the interviews has been conducted through the theoretical framework of secondary literature analysis. In the coding process, I have paid special attention to repetitions, linguistic connectors that might imply causal relationships, preexisting theory-related material, and similarities and differences between the interviews (ibid.: 580).

Narrative Analysis and Life Story Method

As mentioned above has the research applied narrative analysis prompted by an attempt to conduct life history research (Bryman, 2012: 489; Denzin 2009: 222). The life story method has been based on *researched life stories* through transcribed interviews. Different life categories have been explored including notions regarding origin, cultural settings, major life decisions, inner life (current or previous struggles, periods of happiness etc.), social factors and visions of the future (Bryman, 2012: 490). This had been done in order to give a somewhat holistic account of a narrative analysis in order to understand concepts such as “how do people make sense of what happened and to what effect” rather than merely “what actually happened” in an attempt to address the research questions (Bryman 2012:582).

In addition to the conducted field research has secondary analysis on preexisting research been employed. Apart from the obvious advantages of this method, potential pitfalls also deserve to be addressed. These include the lack of the knowledge regarding social circumstance under which the data has been produced when dealing with a holistic narrative approach (Bryman, 2012: 586). Despite these issues secondary analysis does offer a great set of data and material to be further explored (ibid.: 587). In order to conduct a comparative analysis with the results from my empirical study, secondary analysis also offer great many possibilities.

Theory

Most research regarding friendship takes root in either the structural construction of certain aspects of friendship such as the abstract notion of intimacy or care (Reis and Shaver, 1988; Murray, 2005). But few has looked at the operational need for friendship in a society associated with endless choices

– not only in the wide acceptance of queering relationship and the possibility of a decline in the nuclear family ideal, but in terms choosing life trajectory as well.

Intimacy and Care

According to Roseneil and Budgeon (2004), it is widely acknowledged that the heteronormative nuclear family lie at the core of the sociological framework of ‘family’ (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004: 137). They believe that studies of intimacy, love, care, and sociality are primarily studied within the realm of family, thus cultivating a tendency of continuously overlooking said structures beyond the scope of family, and in the process marginalizing people with ‘non-standard’ intimacies (Berlant and Warner (2000) quoted in Roseneil et. al. 2004: 137). This section regarding intimacy and care attempts to highlight or argue for the importance of not ‘forgetting’ friendship when discussing intimacy and care. The significance of the family as a reproductive institution comprising a woman, a man, and a child(ren), according to Roseneil and Budgeon, is too inflexible within the sociological turf (ibid.: 137). This structure does not favor values represented in for instance the field of the LGBTQIA community (Roseneil et al., 2004: 136, 137), and consequently many diverse structures stay unnoticed, not to mention the concept of friendship.

The critique of the traditional definition of family within sociology is reinforced by Nordqvist (2014) who questions the outdated paradigm in her study on the process of choosing a sperm donor in lesbian parentage. She employs the concepts of the construction of kinship, and elaborates on the idea formulated by Jenner Mason (2008) concerning the formation of family through *kinning*; everyday interactions and ‘role-play’ that actively creates relatedness (Mason (2008) in Nordqvist, 2014: 269). She argues that kinship ought to be understood as a “multilayered and malleable resource with an exceptional capacity to encompass difference” (Nordqvist 2014: 268). Hence, the constructivist creation of connectedness within the paradigm of kinship lies at the core of Nordqvist’s focus. Even though Nordqvist does not challenge the overall perception of family, both Nordqvist, Roseneil and Budgeon levitates the point of challenging the social bonds connecting people – whether in a family, or as a source of intimacy and care, they believe the bond transcends classical thoughts of ‘real’ connectedness as a direct consequence of the heteronormative family structure (blood-related kinship, heterosexual relationships, etc.).

Reflections on Relations

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argues that the emerging ‘alternative’ relationships are a product of the increased individualization, detraditionalization and self-reflexivity of the modern society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002) in Roseneil et al, 2004: 139). Thus, inherited structures in the

hegemonic heteronormative relations are re-negotiated in the light of a more inclusive view upon family, as it offers a reinvention of the dyad and kinship. Henceforth, homosexual partners, platonic partners, family of choice, *kinnig* – the complete palette of ‘alternative’ ways of constructing notions of ‘family’ must assume a great degree of reflexivity in relating to one another as opposed to classical institutions such as marriage that, according per Heaphy et al (2002), offers a hereditary structure of certain ‘given’ power dynamics (Heaphy et al; Jackson and Scott 2002: 249). Giddens (1992) approves of the renegotiation of relationship guidelines seen in same-sex couples, as they mirror his suggestion of the ideal *pure relationship* (Giddens, 1992: 94), that challenges the inherited patriarchal structure found in heteronormative power dynamics. This is achieved by encouraging egalitarian relationships through renegotiating said heteronormative power structures, which, according to Giddens, is continually negotiated in the 'non-standard' sexual relationship. Hence, the ways of relating nowadays becomes reflective projects, which demands great navigational skills in order to adopt to continuously changing social and cultural paradigms.

In the research done by Roseneil and Budgeon, none of their subjects had seen their alternative lifestyles as a conscious counter reaction to a societal structure that had mainly profited half the population (male-half), as opposed to similar movements advocated by political visionaries of the 60s and 70s (Roseneil et al. 2004: 153). Their subjects had simply chosen a preferred lifestyle, not as radicals nor activist, but as a life trajectory where their motivation lay not with family but with platonic relationships that constituted their need for intimacy and care – again suggesting an organic shift in sociocultural paradigms.

Considerations aimed towards the debate regarding *kinning* in Nordqvist’s research also reflects a playful approach, where the construction of a family becomes a conscious engagement and thus beyond the realm of a ‘natural’ occurrence of family (Nordqvist 2013: 48). Thus, family becomes utilized as an adjective rather than a noun, as suggested by David Morgan (1996), hence 'family practices' instead a preconceived concept related to a blood-bound nuclear family (David Morgan (1996) in Roseneil et al. 2004: 136).

Finally, if family is a question of everyday interactions and practices, as suggested by Nordqvist, the question of *blood* is of diminutive application, and if so, the quintessential framework regarding *family* becomes inoperable, and the common denominator becomes clearer; the concept of intimacy and care. Consequently, to understand notions of intimacy and care, within the field of sociology, one must disregard the framework of family, and instead focus on ways of relating in social networks in general. A shift in the paradigm also serves to highlight aspects of the imperceptible scientific field

of friendship as a concept of potential paramount importance when conversing intimacy and care central to the individual in sociology in the 21st century. This links to the research questions in terms of understanding an emotional support system in light of care and intimacy.

Formation of Identity in Modern Society

It is argued by Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) that in an era characterized by ‘powerful processes of individualization’ the enquiry of intimacy has gained increased momentum within sociology. They confer to the changes in social, cultural and economic contexts that provokes increased demand for ‘individual life strategies’, which impetuses questions of how people organize their lives regarding their personal lives, love and care in the new millennium (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004: 135). Individualization as a process may affect the way individuals organize their intimate relations including notions of friends, and social interaction. According several theories the formation of identity is processed in social interaction. It can therefore prove useful to investigate notions of the formation of identity in times of modernity.

The abstract notion of ‘modernity’ is characterized by the multiple assortment of choices in the formation of a reflexive self, which filters the choices through ‘abstract systems’ (Giddens, 1991: 5). The abstract system refers to a combination of a *symbolic token*, a mechanism such as money that obliterates time/space compressions, and an *expert system* which denotes the concept of expertise and technical accomplishment that ‘guarantees’ performance across time and space (Ritzer and Stepnisky 2014: 544). In this external constellation *trust* becomes quintessential – the trust or faith in people or systems (Giddens, 1991: 34). In order to process the assortment of choices through these abstract systems the existential notion of *reflexivity* becomes crucial. Giddens (1991) argues that despite immense and continuous changes or transformations the modern society undergoes, people manage (or attempts) to incorporate society and self in ‘a global milieu’ (Ritzer et al 2014: 547; Giddens 1991: 32). Giddens argues that this coping mechanism is generated from the act of actively “reconstructing the universe of social activity around them” (Giddens 1991: 12). Thereby combining the external circumstances of a rapidly changing society (abstract systems) and environment with the ‘personal life’ that encompasses the struggles of intimate issues. Examples of external circumstances could be the emancipation of women and the transformation of intimacy within marriage, which offers opportunities of engaging in new relationships, and henceforth initiating the process of ‘kinning’ as formulated by Nordqvist (2013), that is bound to happen when two families are combined post-marriage (or post-significant partnership) (Giddens 1992; Giddens 1991; Nordqvist 2013). This necessitates great negotiation on the behalf of the individuals involved, which requires a

transformation of the personal life and intimacy to adhere to external circumstances thus combining both in a reconstruction of the ‘universe of social activities’ (Giddens, 1991: 13). Giddens also reflect upon the dialectical relationship between the macro- and micro structures of continuous self-reflection, “transformations in self-identity and globalization... are the two poles of the dialectic of the local and the global in conditions of high modernity. Changes in intimate aspects of personal life... Are directly tied to the establishment of the social connections of very wide scope... For the first time in human history, the “self” and “society are interrelated in a global milieu” (Giddens 1991: 32). Modernity consequently relates to the ‘post-traditional’ order, where a transformation of time and space (globalization, increased reliance on abstract systems etc.), and a heightened trust in an organic society (characterized by specialized functions in society) requires fundamental trust in a society marked by risks (Giddens, 1991: 19, 12, 201; Zetterberg 1993: 6). Giddens argues that it results in a deviation from ‘pre-established precepts or practices’, and thus ushers the context of the reflexivity (Giddens, 1991: 20). Ritzer elaborates on Giddens take on reflexivity, denoting that the self is thus both a product of a “self-exploration” and the “development of intimate social relationships” (Ritzer et al. 2014: 547). Giddens explains: “Self-identity, in other words, is not something that is just given, as a result of the continuities of the individual’s action-system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (Giddens 1991: 52). Implying that self-identity is not merely a given entity or personal trait, but needs to obtain reflexive awareness. Giddens argues that the self is “reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography” (Giddens, 1991: 53). Hence, it can be argued, that there is a need to establish an independent identity in order to deal with the many possibilities while at the same time remain quick to readjust said identity/paradigm. As Ritzer recalled, this reflexivity is construed in intimate relations (Ritzer et al, 2014: 547), as it is actively reconstructed, “social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about these very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (Ritzer et al, 2014: 545, Giddens 1991: 38). In order to comprehend the biographical narrative, Giddens refers to the lack of same – discontinuity in chronological experiences. He argues, that in a society saturated with rapid external changes, a sense of fear or anxiety regarding one’s existence is bound to result in compulsive trepidation of possible risks, and the meaninglessness of modernity (anomie) (Giddens, 1991: 201), and in worst case paralysis (ibid.: 53). Thus, Giddens argue, the existential question of self-identity is the biography sustained by the capacity to ‘keep it going’, and this require authenticity in the narrative in order to do so on a day-to-day basis. Henceforth, the individual must combine external events or changes with

the continuing story that constitutes a sense of self (ibid.: 54). This idea is supported by Charles Taylor who articulates “In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going” (Giddens 1991: 54). In summary Giddens argues that modernity and identity takes roots in reflexivity combining both external and internal circumstances and incorporates them into a notion or biography of self thus ‘restructuring the universe of social activity around them’ in everyday social interactions.

Beck, also concerned with the notion of reflexivity, supports Giddens motif on modernity and reflection stressing the progression of individualism. That in the West people are increasingly free of structural constraints, such as class, and people tend to reflexively create their own life trajectory, and self-identity within framework of the society they inhabit (Ritzer et al, 2014: 549). Ritzer recalls how Beck puts emphasis on social relations: “the newly formed social relationships and social networks now have to be individually chosen; social ties, too, are becoming *reflexive*, so that they have to be established, maintained, and constantly renewed by individuals” (Beck 1992: 97, quoted in Ritzer et al, 2014: 549). Hence, the operative freedom that comes with a less constrained society (modern society), also comes with the prerequisite of being more reflexive, and consequently renewed. When discussing modernity, reflexivity, and individuality it can be useful to address the power/knowledge discourse concerning individuality. This adds fuel to the concept of the need for reflexivity of the individual and the fear of anomie (not fulfilling a social norm, thus falling outside of society (Cote, 2002: 96)). With the loosening societal constraint, our given social identity becomes less positioned, and so there is an increased need to control the ‘shaping’ of our identity – including the closest relationships. Consequently, it may be argued that friendship could become increasingly more important as a tool to relate and navigate in a society characterized by modernity, and as a way of understanding the “self” where biographical identities, and social relations are crucial qualities of reflexivity. Another aspect of the individualization are the numerous choices in a society with miniscule limitation.

Durkheim and Anomie

Anomie was first coined by Durkheim, and refers to the sensation of isolation that can occur with the lack of regulation. Durkheim believes that the modern society is particularly prone to anomie due to times of social and economic crisis and upturn. In terms of his take on suicide Durkheim argues that changes in the norms people are accustomed to may lead to the “moods of rootlessness and normlessness” that may endanger the rational behavior (Ritzer et al. 2014: 95). In line with Durkheim’s thoughts upon modernity an increasingly organic society would succumb to increased

fear of isolation and anomie in the presence of an interdependent and divided society (Cote, 2002: 96). Organic society refers to the modern society with solidarity based on differences in contrast to *mechanical solidarity* that is built on similarity. The organic solidarity is characterized by having a weaker common consciousness, and a heightened focus on the individualization (Zetterberg, 1993: 6). The solidarity arises in the interdependency in a structural society. Individuals in an organic society, according to Durkheim, are not necessarily dependent on the same common feeling of morale or consciousness, but instead dependent on increased interdependency for society to function (Zetterberg, 1993: 6). Durkheim believed anomie was a byproduct of organic society. Anomie is characterized by a low degree of integration, and control in society. He believed that falling out of society might lead to feeling of meaninglessness, and when society momentarily lack control it might lose direction or meaning leading to unhappiness. Parallels can be drawn to Giddens take on modernity, and the anxiety of not living up to then norm, as anomie may erupt out of rapid modernization, and lack of regulation thereof in society.

Transformation of Intimacy

With increased individuality and reflexivity regarding social interaction, intimacy is bound to experience a shift in the paradigm as well. As Beck (1992) mentions: relations needs to be constantly renewed, maintained, and established. This demands a great deal of negotiation as advocated by Roseneil et al. (2004), and Nordqvist (2014). In order to understand how friendship is experienced it can be useful to acknowledge the generic restructuring of intimacy that widens the paradigm of how to relate to on another. As romantic relationships have experienced a change from a dependent institution of marriage (Giddens, 1992: 53), into romantic relationships predominantly based on a 'pure relationship' ideal formulated by Giddens, who proposes a transformation of intimacy characterized by "increasing autonomy of women and upon plastic sexuality" (Giddens 1992: 94). Giddens describes the pure relationship as "... a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only on so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it" (Giddens 1992: 58). Thus, Giddens believe that the transformation of intimacy will lead to relationship characterized by mutual negotiation of conducts. That people only stay in a relationship if it benefits both individuals. This transformation, according to Giddens, will result in an array of healthy relationship symptoms such as the need to develop the self as a first priority, freedom of choice, and a relationship that deals with all aspects of reality (ibid.: 94-95). He draws reference to feminist theories arguing that as women's emancipation questions the power

dynamic in romantic relationships, causing the need for a *generic restructuring* of intimacy (Giddens 1992: 58). However, in his analysis he mainly refers to new ways of formulating *romantic* relations. He does open up for the discussion regarding romantic relations outside of the heteronormative paradigm, but his main focus lies with romantic relationship nonetheless. This study, on the other hand, will attempt understand the formation and importance of *friendship* in relation to modernity and the construction of identity, but will draw reference to Giddens' take on pure relationships. His transformation also opens up for increased agency with the romantic relationship as a choice, that needs to carefully encourage self as a first priority, and the aspect of *reality* that hence encourages independence.

Life Stages

It has been argued numerous times that the given path of growing into adulthood has changed rapidly over the last few decades. According to Arnett (2006), has this transition, in fact, been more deinstitutionalized and increasingly individualized than ever before (Arnett, 2006: 4). He argues, that, “the social and institutional structures that once both supported and restricted people in the course of coming of age have weakened, leaving people with greater freedom but less support as they make their way into adulthood” (Arnett, 2006: 4), and continues, that this leads to a sole reliance on own agency and resource (ibid.: 4). Erikson formulated a potential for ‘prolonged adolescence’ in the industrialized societies back in 1950, which Arnett now coins as *emerging adulthood* with the age of 18 to mid-twenties characterized by ‘identity exploration’, and as Arnett puts it, as they are more, “independent of their parents than they were as adolescents [10-18] and most of them have left home, but they have not yet entered the stable, enduring commitments typical of adult life, such as a long-term job, marriage, and parenthood.” (Arnett 2006: 8 – brackets added). Arnett noticed in his own research, that in order to make decisions such as longterm partnerships, career or in general life trajectory, emerging adulthood had to have a clear sense of identity and thus agency. Emerging adulthood (18-mid-twenties) is coined as a transitional age between adolescence (age 10-18), and classical ‘young adults’ (age 19-29) (Arnett 2006: 10), and are characterized by much the same, but with a dimension of the importance of intimacy and identity in emerging adulthood. Arnett argues, that most identity exploration takes hold the defining years in emerging adulthood (ibid.: 8). He argues that the stage of life is inherently self-focused – not to be confused with self-centered – and that exploration of choices is immensely important prior to committing to adulthood (beyond the age of 30) (ibid.: 10-11). Thus, emerging adulthood/young adulthood (19-29), becomes a stage for

transforming oneself, establishing independent identities, make autonomous decisions regarding the person they would like to evolve into, and how they wish to live.

Generations

It is widely recognized that Mannheim familiarized the concept of generations to the analysis of social stratification according to Eyerman and Turner (1998: 94). Based on Mannheim's theory on generation, Eyerman et al argues that a "generational cohort survives by maintaining a collective memory of its origins, its historic struggles, its primary historical and political events, and its leading characters and ideologists" (Eyerman et al 1998: 97). Hence, a common denominator within generations are an understanding of major historical events and movements that influences the outlook of a generation (or a cohort of people). It is important to note that Mannheim does include notions regarding class and how that may reflect upon how groups of people within a generation perceive a historical event, hence creating opposing units or stratification within generations (Pilcher, 1994: 483).

This concept of generations being affected by outward conditions, can be linked again to Giddens' take biographies and the implementation of external circumstances in the understanding of self. This is reinforced by Feuer (1969) who claims that "A generation in the sociological sense consists of persons in a common age group who in their formative years have known the same historical experiences... Often a generation's consciousness is shaped by the experience of what we might call the 'generational event'" (Feuer, 1969: 25, quoted in Milkman, 2017: 5). This quote by Feuer echoes Mannheim's take on generations as a shared understanding of past events, and a sense of present manifestation of (to some extent) shared outlook. This is elaborated by Milkman (2017) who proclaims that the U.S. Millennials are not only the first generation of "digital natives", they are also the most educated generation than any previous generation, and that they "face a labor market in which precarity is increasingly the norm. And despite proclamations to the contrary, they confront persistent racial and gender disparities, discrimination against sexual minorities, and widening class inequality—all of which they understand in the framework of "intersectionality." (Milkman, 2017). Thus, it is to Milkman's understanding that the rapid "acceleration in the tempo of social and cultural transformation" (Mannheim, 1923: 384), or rapid modernization, demands increased need for reflection on a social self in relation to social and cultural transformations. The delayed entry into adulthood also give rise to a prolonged period characterized by insecurity which is common for young adults (Milkman 2017; Arnett 2006). The increased demand for reflection on social self happens dialectically in the interaction with other individuals, "were it not for the existence of social

interaction between human beings – were there no definable social structure, no history based on a particular sort of continuity, the generation would not exist as a social phenomenon: there would merely be birth, ageing and death” (Mannheim, 1952: 291, quoted in Pilcher, 1994: 485). Henceforth, the need to understand the importance of relations in an increasingly precarious stage of life in modern society.

The Interviews

For original transcripts, cf. appendix.

Mette, 24, lives in Copenhagen in a collective with three other women her age. They share their life with each other including the management of the household counting the kitchen and the inventory/food, common areas, bathrooms, and garden. The collective is part of a bigger group consisting of two collectives and independent members. They share equipment such as loud speakers, light and other ‘party essentials’. Occasionally they eat together and celebrate each other’s birthdays and the like. They call their mini-collective ‘La Familia’ as a direct reference to an extended family. Mette used to study journalism but is now majoring in Comparative Literature and has just published her first book with four of her good friends. She refers to this particular group of friends as a creative friendship; the urge to spend time together is transformed into creative energy. The potential of creating something together in their mutual understanding of their creative facets. Mette considers herself to have been growing up in a traditional heteronormative nuclear family with siblings. Central to Mette’s narrative is her emotional and existential reliance on her friends, mentioning how they create the framework from which she understands herself. Mette considers herself primarily heterosexual and is currently in a relationship to Louis (M), her first boyfriend. They have been together for a year and a half. Before Louis (M) Mette has been predominantly single with short-lived relationships.

Anders, 27, lives in Copenhagen with his new roommate. Until recently he lived with his boyfriend for four years in a shared apartment in central Nørrebro. He grew up with a single mother and an absent father who was working abroad. At the time of the interview he sees his father a couple of times a year. His father has a new family. In Anders’ narrative, he added emphasis on growing up in a suburb as a way of identifying his adolescence. This included coming out at 15, and his first encounters with the gay community which was associated with the suburban glamour of reality TV-aspirations. He mentioned how he was considered a ‘nerd’ due his lack of interest in sports mixed with a passion for computer games. He did not think of himself as bullied, but it was not until he

came out that he was invited to parties and were considered ‘cool’. He got a boyfriend from the age of 16 to 19, and recalling going through radical changes that established the foundation of how he sees himself today (see *adolescence*, Erikson 1950). This includes associating himself with an academic social circle and a keen interest in politics. He studies journalism and has just returned from living in Istanbul. Anders identifies as homosexual and has been in and out of long-term relationship for eight out of 11 years (age 16-27). He is very aware of how each of his romantic relationship brought about new friendships, and he also stresses that the break-ups he has gone through had always been very hard on him resulting in him losing friends in the process of grievance. A resurfacing tendency in Anders’ narrative is his emphasis on romantic relationships and how his platonic friendships are in addition to his partners. He is also aware of the risk of ending up alone, seeing as a traditional family including children is not guaranteed. He thus stresses the importance of having homosexual friends as they are going through some of the same thoughts and understands Anders’ standpoint more accurately. Anders also acknowledges the fact, that many of his heterosexual friends has the probability of prioritizing their own family when children come into the picture. Hence, the need for a large circle of friends that might eventually constitute his family in the future. Anders’ last relationship ended when he discovered that his ex-boyfriend had been cheating on him with his four best friends for several years. He thus lost his boyfriend for four years and his four closest friends. He was planning to propose when the revelation was made.

Clara, 23, was born in Russia to Russian parents, but moved to Denmark with her mother at the age of 12. She has since mastered Danish, went to Danish primary school and International High school. Clara also lives on Nørrebro in an apartment she rents from a friend while she is abroad. Three of her current friends has previously lived in the same apartment at some point. Clara has not lived with her parents since the age of 15 due to boarding school and later moving to Copenhagen. She has been in a relationship with Karl for several years. Clara grew up with a single mother. Her father and older brother stayed back in Russia along with the rest of her family. Clara has a bachelor in Psychology and Communication and is currently studying a full program in Psychology - her dream education. Central to Clara’s narrative is her dependency on her friends in her everyday life. Clara does not consider herself to be a person with many friends, instead she takes pride in a few but very intimate friendships. Clara preferred to be anonymous in this study, and ‘Clara’ is therefore not her real name.

Katrine, 24, currently lives in Copenhagen by herself in a temporary resident situation. She has lived numerous places with numerous different friends, acquaintances, and people she did not know

prior to moving in. She grew up with two ‘mothers’ consisting of her biological mother and her aunt. Aside from her two ‘mothers’ she has a brother, who is her biological cousin from a second deceased aunt. She has never known her father. Her mother and her aunt decided to move in together due to previous failed relationship and a wish for a more stable household for Katrine and themselves. Katrine considers herself lucky. Thus, she has never known a heteronormative nuclear family. Katrine is currently in a romantic relationship with Louis (K). They have been together for almost two years now. Prior to Louis (K) Katrine has had a couple of romantic relationships but nothing of this magnitude. Katrine has a BA-degree in theatre science but is starting to doubt her years-long dream of living a nomadic theatre life. A year prior to the interview Katrine’s then-best friend, Nico¹, had a thrombosis in her brain. She survived and has fully recovered, but it shook Katrine to her core. This was due to how she had handled Nico’s health calamity. Katrine feels loss over her friendship as it did not survive Nico’s accident. Katrine has doubts concerning the extent to which she ought to include her boyfriend in her emotional life as to not bring him down with her. Katrine is very contemplative and reflexive when she narrates not only her life, but also her current feelings and thoughts upon her friendship which is associated with a lot of love, but also an undercurrent of competitiveness and insecurity.

The common denominator throughout the interviews has been the heavy reliance on friendship as a way of completing their own position in their life. It appeared that friendship would constitute their existential approach to themselves in their everyday life (Mette and Anya), and friendship that could be as heart-breaking as any romantic relationship (Katrine and Nico), and also the importance of friendship in terms of the understanding of a potentially precarious social future (Anders).

Another tendency common for the participants has been the instability or unsettlement in an age of emerging adulthood to young adulthood characterized by short-term residence situations, exploration of education, love, voyages, and identities and a precaution against making enduring commitments. This is in alignment with the thoughts of Arnett (2006) and Eriksson (1950).

Analysis

As mentioned earlier in the theory section there are multiple changes happening in society on a social, cultural, and economic level which influences how people relate to each other, society, and themselves. The first section of the analysis will give a brief introduction to the macro-trends

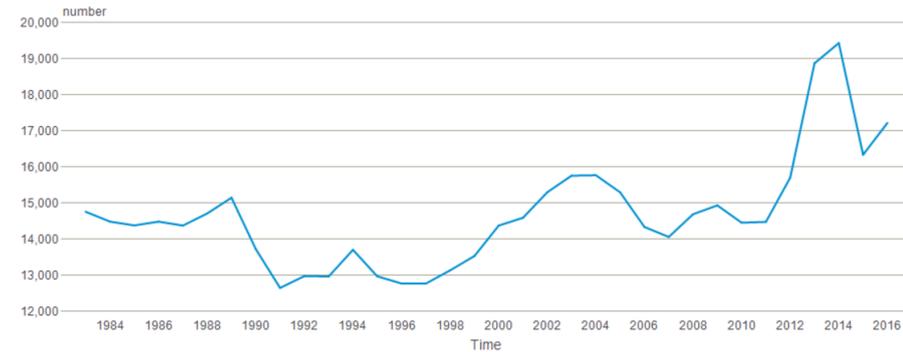
¹ Nico is not her real.

influencing the opportunities structurally presented to participants. This may also support their narratives in understanding their perspectives concerning how they reflect upon situations in both macro- and micro terms. The first section also stresses the importance of acknowledging the potential of considering alternative ways of relating. The second section is the exploration of the interviews, and the tendencies revealed in relation to how friendship is understood, the formation of identity, and finally an attempt to understand the importance of these relations using the framework shaped by the established theories.

All the participants stem from the so-called 'Millennium Generation' (1980s to mid-1990s) characterized by familiarity with technology including social media as a mean to stay connected, and fosters heightened sense of belongingness – so-called 'digital natives'. (Milkman, 2017: 25). The generation is also marked by the recession back in 2008, that gave rise to an increased sense of financial instability as many people lost their jobs, and income dropped (ibid.: 18). In an interview with Daily Herald, professor Larry Nelson (2007) says, "In prior generations, you get married and you start a career and you do that immediately. What young people today are seeing is that approach has led to divorces, to people unhappy with their careers". This is supported by an article from CNN Money (2014), where a report from Urban Institute shows that, "Today's young adults are on track have the lowest rates of marriage by age 40 compared to any previous generation. If the current pace continues, more than 30% of Millennial women will remain unmarried by age 40, nearly twice the share of their Gen X counterparts,". Historian Neil Howe (2014) argues, that this is because "many people feel they have to be more established, especially financially, before they walk down the aisle." (CNN Money, 2014), thus maintains a causal conviction that the economic recession affected the Millennials in their risk assessment regarding future commitments following a Mannheim discourse. Both articles treat statistics derived from the U.S., and focuses on a white middle class population, but recent numbers from Statistics Denmark (Dansk Statistik) suggests similar tendencies with a declining marriage rate, and increased divorce rates as seen in figures 2 and 3.

Marriages and divorces

Movement: Divorces



Source: Statistics Denmark

Figure 1: Graph showing an increase in divorces

Marriages and divorces

Movement: Marriages



Source: Statistics Denmark

Figure 2: Graph showing a decrease in marriages

Other numbers witnessing a change in society from Statistics Denmark is the rising age of first-time parents (cf. figure 4), rising numbers of single motherhood (cf. figure 5), rising number of same-sex couples with children (cf. fig. 6), increasing numbers of single women who do not have kids (cf. fig. 7), and vice versa with a rising number of men without children (cf. fig. 8), and finally two graphs (9 and 10) showing the increase of registered- and married same-sex couples^{1, 2}

This brief introduction to societal changes draws a map of a generation of late bloomers vis-à-vis long-term relationships, careers, and the initiation of their own “project family”. Nordqvist’s critique of heteronormative understanding of family is reinforced by the normalization – or at least increasing numbers – of ‘non-standard’ structures of assumed intimacy and care as seen in figures 5, 6, 9 and

² Back in 1989, Denmark was the first country to allow registered partnership, and in 2012 the Danish Parliament passed a new law giving homosexual right to marry in a traditional manner (retsinformation.dk). This reflects in graphs 9 and 10.

10. The rising numbers of people choosing to stay single, as seen in figures 7 and 8, suggests an increased importance of understanding practices of intimacy and care between *people* regardless of traditional patterns, as advocated by Budgeon and Roseneil (2004).

It can be argued, that the societal changes all point towards signs and tendencies that suggests a trend of decentering or delaying the heteronormative nuclear family, thus raising the question of the importance of investing in your friendships as they provide intimacy and love in crucial times and stages outside of the traditional dyad/kinship paradigm. Hence, increased focus on the formation of relations in any social network.

Results

During my interviews, I have found that friendship is regarded as equally important to the romantic relationship thus giving ground for the implication of augmented focus on the study of friendship as it does not comply with traditional theoretical framework. Especially the emotional co-dependence in the life of young adults is interesting with the emerging normalization of ‘alternative’ life choices to that of the hegemonic and privileged nuclear family ideal, and increased sense of precariousness as a result of the declining societal constraint.

Every-day Practices

The first concept that were revealing itself in the interviews were the heavy emphasis on *every-day practices*. These included practices such as coming home to someone, cooking, and eating together and being able to casually hang out with no specific purpose of doing so. This was also associated with words such a trust and the act of sharing. The act of sharing could be the simple deed of documenting your day to your friends, it could also relate to a deeper discussion on emotional occurrences. Anders recalls the importance of impulsively calling a friend up for a beer after a stressed day, or being ‘useless together’ on a ‘heavy Sunday’ as fundaments of trust in a friendship on an everyday-life context. He also emphasizes the importance of cooking for people, and for being socially stimulated. This emphasis on everyday-practices seem to relate to a sense of belongness. It articulates repetitive practices that create a sense of security in everyday life, and promotes notions of familiarity or community. Anders’ need to surround himself with his friends impulsively and in moments of vulnerability (heavy Sundays indicates a case of vulnerability) as fundaments of trusts and a way of organizing an emotional support system, through the action of everyday practices, where certain ‘guards’ are allegedly down, hence a notion of vulnerability and familiarity (Nordqvist 2014; Roseneil et al. 2004). Mette also recognizes the importance of everyday practices, such as coming

home to her roommates and sharing her day-to-day experiences with them. Mette perceives the importance of her friends in her everyday-life on an existential level with utterances such as:

“I know that relationships mean... Insanely much to me. It is a big part of how I understand myself and my behavior in this world. It [her world] is based on the foundation of my strong relations [to her friends]” ... “It is a way of understanding oneself as okay. I mean, it legitimizes oneself that you are capable of creating the relations” - *Mette, 2017*.³

To Mette’s understanding or experience the presence of her friends constitutes her frame from which she understands herself. Mette also mentions how “through a bond with others I somehow have a bond with reality” as she actively attempts reflect and create her own life orientation. In Giddensian terms, it may signify that her biography so far is successfully achieved and established through the validation of her friends. Thereby Mette incorporates external circumstances per her relations thus manifesting a paradigm and self-identity (Giddens, 1991), confirming Beck’s emphasis on social relations – that Mette’s individually chosen friends reflects upon her, and her social identity. In a fluctuating and organic society Mette’s relations also seem to keep her adrift as to not succumb into meaninglessness or disorientation. Subsequently, the concept of every-day practices enlightens the act of intimacy and care outside of the realm of family and romantic relations as advocated by Roseneil and Budgeon.

Fundamental, Deep love

Another concept that appeared in the interviews were the *fundamental and deep love* that constituted the make-up of the participants’ relations, and in accordance with themselves. In Katrine’s narrative, the significance of her ‘break-up’ with her best friend Nico is a key theme. She uses the story in relation to how she sees herself, and how she relates to her other relations.

“I think it made such a huge impression on me, that someone that close to me, and who was in the same stage in life as I was, could have such incident happen to her. It really took me of guard how I reacted to it. Because I think, that I saw myself as a person, who could encompass such things, and [someone] who could be there – and be there all the time. And I could not do that with Nico, because she was feeling *so* bad, and [she] was not herself. And I did not know how to deal with it. I could not figure it out, and ehmn... I think that it was incredibly hard to be there [for her]. Ehm. And to get to know her again because she had changed so much. And I think it is so hard to go from being really close friends into being *casual* friends” (Katrine, 2017).

³ All the interviews are translated from Danish. Confer appendix to see the original transcripts.

Thus, it seems that an external occurrence caused Katrine to reconsider her own identity in relation to her friend. It appears to have prompted her to reflect upon how she related to her friends in an operative way. How she ‘used’ them in accordance to herself and her life trajectory. Katrine mentions, how it made her realize what her friends meant to her, in a way that she sorts of took it for granted before. In *cadeau* to her reflections, she mentions how important it is to involve her friends in her internal and external life affairs in order not to feel lonely:

“I think it occurred to me quite recently how important it is, and it is stupid, because, it so important to talk with your friends about these sort of things, and involve them, because otherwise one can get the feeling of being alone. And to feel like... There is something your friends do not understand” (Katrine, 2017).

Again, the occurrence with Nico seems to have left Katrine vulnerable and unable to express how it had affected her, and consequently unable to incorporate the incident into her life trajectory or biography as it had altered her own self-perception, and disturbed her other relations. Katrine stresses the importance of self-disclosure as she would otherwise find herself pushing people away from her. Thus, the aspect of self-disclosure becomes a paramount imperative trait in terms of Katrine self-understanding and in her level of intimacy with her friends. She describes how her relationship to Nico prior to her accident, had been like a partnership; they had talked every day, and “used each other on the emotional level” meaning, that they were emotionally dependent. Nico and Katrine had lived together for periods of time despite having had separate apartments. This implies a tendency practicing a repetitive pattern of intertwining narratives and thus becoming vital to each other’s biographies (Giddens, 1991: 53). In addition to Katrine’s account on her intimate emotional relationship to Nico, Mette also acknowledges how her friends are of quintessential importance to her generic organization of self:

“But I will say that I think that it is my general experience that I think that I am pretty [emotionally?] fulfilled by my friendship. Like, *that’s* what constitutes me rather than [any] romantic relationship. It’s more like something extra. Which has likely something to do with when one started to date” ... “I’m thinking that many of my relationships gives me a lot that does not have anything to do with him [Louis (M)]. That they fulfill regardless of his – or anyone else’s – presence in my life” (Mette, 2017)

Mette show a very deep connection with her friends confessing a prioritization of her friendships, as they somehow contribute to her stabilization, and sense of achievement (satisfaction). In accordance to Arnett's take on 'emerging adulthood' it can be argued, that her friends had contributed to her understanding of self in the making of her identity in those crucial years, and thus stimulates her biography and need for security (Arnett, 2006; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). This need for independency in a time where many experience a latent need for romantic relations to blossom, resonates with the need to establish a coherent identity in order to deal with a modern society. Clara also recognizes the need for independency in her narrative, stating that she is terrified of losing herself, and that her friends withstand her grounds through love, affirmation, and support. Again, it echoes a fear of anomie in the face a non-constrained society with ever-changing paradigms (Durkheim 1897, Beck 1992, Giddens 1991). She, like Mette, emphasizes the need for her friends to make sense of her own decisions – something that cannot be achieved through only one person or one standpoint.

Hence, friendship can be understood as a framework of understanding oneself in the face of insecurity (Milkman 2017).

Societal Apprehension

Another concept in the narrative that were repeated was a feeling of *societal apprehension*. An aspect of Katrine's interview was an underlying tendency of competitiveness within a certain friend group. She remarks how the success and talents of her friends can make her feel less worthy sometimes. Hence, her biographical framework of understanding the self perhaps detects a precarious situation where her hierarchical position in society is threatened by her dominant friends. Katrine also considers herself trapped in 'still air', where she is trying to figure out the next big leap of faith in terms of her life course. Katrine has recently changed her mind regarding her future trajectory. This is followed by a fear of falling behind her friends – not necessarily falling behind in life, "it feels like they [her friends] have to get me started on something [goal, path, plan] so that I can be on their level". This can relate to a sense (or fear) of anomie (Cote, 2002), where Katrine is afraid that she is going to fail the norm dictated by society but processed through her friends, giving rise the anxiety regarding her sense of direction and integration (Ritzer et al. 2014: 95).

Mette, however, gives a slightly different account on the way she perceives her friendship concerning her own position, "I have given it a lot of thought, and I think that if I can be friends with this, and this, and this person, it must mean that I am actually really awesome. Because they are super awesome – kind of logic." In Mette's case does her friends' subsistence boost her self-confidence as her friends positively validates her self-identity, as opposed to Katrine, that sometimes experience an

exasperation in the face of an ever-changing game of little regulation. Despite the trepidation of normlessness the participants also mentioned bravery and courage as a result of their relations: “The courage to be honest, I think derives from many of my friendships” (Mette, 2017). And Katrine mentions “the courage to be myself, without saying anything”. So, it seems that the respondents find assurance in their self-identity in the relationship to their friends. It seems they are able to let go of some of their inhibitions when invigorated by their relations.

Physical manifestation of Intimacy, Trust and Stability

Another interesting concept that was revealed through the interviews was the need for being physically intimate with the participants’ friends. Mette mentions the need to be able to be naked in front of her friends, and to physically touch each other. Katrine also recalls a need for physical contact with her friends in order to validate mutual affection. In Anders’ narrative there was a huge emphasis on the importance of not initiating any romantic contact with his friends, “I have never *been* with any of my friends. One time I hooked up with my friend when we were drunk together in a vacation house when I was 19. But I am very conscious about not... hooking up with my friends. And it is something that I know a lot of these guys have done” (Anders 2017). The importance of not sleeping with his friends are grounded in the need for mutual trust, and the importance of being able to sleep in the same bed or wear nothing but underwear without feeling aroused or initiating sexual tension. The need for separating the two. This notion of effortless trust is echoed in Katrine’s narrative, who mentions how she has never feared a friend ‘leaving her’ or ‘stopped loving her’ (before Nico, that is) as she sometimes would experience with a romantic relationship. Katrine also mentions “But I think, yea, love-care [kærlighedsomsorg], like, touching is a big part of... It’s something to me that... When you get closer to each other, you caress each other or hold each other” (Katrine, 2017). The physical need for intimacy – or physical manifestation of intimacy - the participants seem to successfully achieve mutual reassurance of accepting love and care. It seems to reflect a need for stability within friendship – and a need to not separate. This is further explored in Anders’ interview, when discussing his need for a homosexual community;

This thing about... Choosing your friends. And, like, when you are homosexual, there is always a risk – depending on how you see it – that you for example do not get kids. [A risk] of not getting *that* kind of stability in your life. And that change – I mean, there is this thing where gay guys can party ‘till they are 60, because they only have responsibility towards themselves. And it is something that I have given a lot of thoughts, and, like, my best friends are also my family. Of course, I have a lovely, lovely family and my dad has moved back to Denmark” “... but this thing, where you

choose your own friends or your own family through your friends, because there is a risk, or a chance, that you will end up without kids even though you might want to have kids, because you might otherwise end up... Alone.” (Anders, 2017)

Again, it becomes evident how much is at risk. What Anders acknowledges regarding his own risk assessment for a future outcome concerning care and intimacy reflects a great deal of consideration for his options on future social relationships. This puts Anders’ in a precarious situation when planning for the future, where he ideally would want kids to stabilize his world, but accepts the fact that he might have to create that stability himself through his friends.

The act of Processing

Katrine recalls how she processes her emotional outburst with her friends. She can primarily only loose herself emotionally around her family or her boyfriend, but whenever these situations arise, she sorts it out with her friends. She believes this has something to do with her biographical narrative, where her friends have monitored and documented her narrative through emerging adulthood (18-mid-twenties) (Arnett 2006), and into her young adulthood (19-29) (Erikson 1950). This results in the symbolic interaction of knowing exactly how to interact with her previously narrated life story and thus also contribute to the on-going of same. It is important to notice, that Katrine’s story or identity is thus grounded or manifested through her friendships. They are the ones documenting her life, and they are also the ones giving rise to her continuous aspirations as she seeks to impress her relationships. It can accordingly be argued, that Katrine uses her friends as a mean to understand herself and reflect upon the events – both external and internal – to her, and process them into being part of her biography hence attesting her existence and continuous progress in life. The same idea resonates in Mette narrative, where she establishes emotional anchors with her friends as means to understand herself: “... It are they [her friends] who knows where I am in my life. Like, emotionally” again referencing to a sense of emotional processing. Her relations are also a ‘free-space’ for Mette to express her emotions without much filter. Both her worries and her joys. She also describes a latent need to *be there* for her friends. Being able to offer emotional support, affirmation and love is another common denominator throughout all the interviews. “... I thought that, about being able to give care is also a need” (Mette, 2017). Thus, the need for self-disclosure, affirmation, and trust must be reciprocal to be meaningful.

Clara mentions in her interview that the content of what she can discuss with her friends are exclusively within the framework of her relations. Clara remarks how her friends have ‘documented’ her biography through emerging adulthood (18-mid-twenties), where she underwent huge changes in

her self-identity. Her friends from late adolescence are still her closest friends and have thus witnessed her experiences of young adulthood as well. Her mother, not surprisingly, have not been let in on Clara's internal life story as well as the additional experiences she has undergone in those crucial years. Her current boyfriend, nor, has been let in on every detail of her life prior to their relationship, thus, Clara recalls, she relates to her friends on a different level – they have the same understanding (more or less) of her biographical identity seeing as they were there all along to help her process it, and they know her emotional (internal) and physical (external) reference-points in the make-up of her identity. Clara mentions how, if she did not have her friends, her education or her boyfriend would not mean as much to her, seeing as it would not make any sense, if she did not have her friends to share her experiences with. To phrase Charles Taylor again “In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going” (Giddens 1991: 54). This resonance well with the story told by all the participants. That they understand themselves through the interaction with their friends with reference to their pasts, present and future.

With the understanding of the risk society and modernity, it can be argued, that possibility of an unstable future or the million choices the participants are exposed to, requires the need to reflect upon their own situation in society. To illustrate the precariousness of increased individualism, the need for validation in terms of processing everchanging paradigms (external and internal), becomes evident in the interviews. The increased emphasis on self-regulations in an unregulated society demands social processing and relationships that comprehend your identity. As people going through their twenties experiencing a wealth of significant choices and expectations of individual trajectories, there is a necessity of close relations to support the participants journey or position (social identity) in society. In order to trust increasingly organic or modern society, the participants also required a trust in their independent self-identity, which is manifested through their relations as validated and recognized identities.

Conclusion

Through widespread argumentation of the importance at looking into friendship in this study, it draws a picture of modernity characterized by detraditionalization, deinstitutionalization, individualization, decreased social constraint, instability, prolonged emerging adolescence, self-focus on realization, reflection, and the social interaction of combining it all in a biographical understanding of self. This has highlighted a theoretical background which helps to understand the importance of friendship.

The introduction put great emphasis on decentering traditional paradigms regarding institutions of intimacy and care and instead pay attention to relations in social networks. The theory addresses the

importance of reflexivity in the formation of self-identity in modern society. Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) argued that modernity forces individuals to reflect upon position in society, seeing as the social restraint has been declining, and major societal changes offers ever-new ways of conducting traditional patterns of intimacy forcing individuals to adhere and re-organize external circumstances into a new internal paradigm, in order to sustain the continuation of the self-biography. This has been a theme directly- and indirectly portrayed in the narratives where emphasis was put in the crucial understanding of self in relation to their friends who in turn constituted their biographical account on self-identity. In a society associated with constant risks (Beck, 1992), and a requirement of a leap of faith in an organic society, having people around you to pick you up or emotionally support you becomes imperative.

This requires intimate relations. Intimate relations with intimate knowledge and understanding of the individuals' identity, as to not feel lost or anomic. A constant validation of self-identity as a means to actively construct and understand orientation in society. To quote Mette again: "through a bond with others I somehow have a bond with reality" can be seen as the acceptance of a rapidly changing society in which her social relations allows her to keep track of her biographical self and thus society in Giddensian terms. The reflexivity in the analysis is thoroughly announced with understandings of the existential importance of friendship in order not to feel lost. Katrine's experience with Nico highlights the depth the existential position of intimate relationships, as well as Clara's biographical anchor with her peers. Anders reflects upon the future risks that comes as a result of non-standard romantic relations. In this case, he actively reflects upon his choice of friends and how they constitute his social stability for the future. Mette recognizes how her identity, and thus her framework from which she comprehends her worldview is mainly constituted of her friends through a decade.

As is argued by Arnett and his take on emerging adult the emphasis on individually creating identity is stressed. This requires great reflection hence the self-focused decade. In my research, I have found similar tendencies of contemplation concerning the development of self, but I have also found an immense co-dependence on people their own age, or *generation*. Thus, relating to Giddens and Beck's take on reflexivity where the social interaction is in focus. All the participants narrated high emotional dependence on their friendship in emotional support systems, that establishes their identity.

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